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Poster

Watching You

By Nicholas von Hoffman

CHICAGO, Feb. 20—As the police are increasingly used as the chosen instrument to deal with the crime problem, the race problem, the dope problem, the youth problem and the riot problem, the police, themselves, increasingly become a problem. Here in Chicago people are upset at learning that their local police department is quietly running a baby CIA operation, directed against the liberal-left community.

A rather complete description of Chicago's CIA, known locally as the Red Squad, has just been published in the Chicago Journalism Review in the form of a long article signed by Lois Wille, the Chicago Daily News' Pulitzer Prize-winning reporter. It is illustrated by a Bill Mauldin cartoon depicting a silly-looking hound dog, in a flowered disguise, sniffing out conspirators and other political malefactors.

The Review was started a few months ago by Chicago newspapermen who felt their slipping industry needed some sharp and continuous jabbing. Total newspaper circulation has dropped by almost 125,000 in the last year.

One way they're supplying critical stimulus is to print tough, controversial stories of a kind that don't often appear in the press here. They hit the bell with their Red Squad piece which accuses this covert arm of the police department of tapping phones, compiling political dossiers, entrapping and inciting others to commit crimes and committing crimes, i.e., burglary, themselves.

What makes the piece convincing is that it quotes from documents filched from the Red Squad's files. One of the most revealing is the political dossier on A. A. Rayner, a black, anti-Daley-machine alderman and a successful ghetto businessman who's always been a Martin Luther King-type racial moderate.

"Rayner now believes the words of Stokely Carmichael," the dossier explains. "However, many of the statements made by Rayner indicate several things—they may not be his own thoughts, or he may have been instructed to relate them in this manner by persons unknown at this writing. Nevertheless he has shifted his position in relation to militancy . . ."

The Review charges that these dossiers are quietly given out to political reliables in order to discredit the people they're written about. The publication also says that Chicago undercover policemen are actively egging people to attack the police and thereby committing crimes which will put them in jail and thus destroy their organizations and the causes for which they stand.

Mrs. Wille quotes one police provocateur, who was posing as a merchant seaman, as giving a speech at a meeting in which he said, "We sailors know how to take care of the cops and the black community is learning. You just have to beat the crap out of them." During the Democratic National Convention one of the incidents that got a lot of shock attention was an attempt to lower an American flag flying in Grant Park across the street from the Hilton Hotel. The Review has located a witness who says she identified one of the men trying to pull down the flag as an undercover Chicago policeman.

"In September, 1967, four Red Squad men broke into the office shared by several peace groups at 1608 W. Madison st.," writes Mrs. Wille "They stole membership lists, typewriters, checkbooks and some personal letters of the director of the Fellowship of Reconciliation."

In addition to burglary, the Review says that Red Squad agents are being sent onto college campuses, not only to infiltrate political organizations their bosses don't agree with, but also to check up on what some of the radical teachers are saying in their classrooms.

The Review has been able to find out a good deal about how the Red Squad works. "Groups of four undercover men are assigned to one control agent who alone is supposed to know their identities and activities," says the magazine, which has published a number of pictures of these spectral law-enforcement officers and has traced their secret headquarters to a front called "Mid-Continent Import-Export." It hasn't been able to discover how much money is spent on Red Squad activities because, like the CIA, these figures are hidden in the budgets of other agencies.

There's no reason to suppose that Chicago is the only place in the country with its own little dirty-tricks department. It's a sound assumption that many other cities have them.

However well intentioned and/or hysterical the public officials are who sanction such operations, there is no question that the results are totally negative. Police clods who can't tell the difference between a moderate, black civic leader and an urban guerrilla are useless as guides. About all they can accomplish is to frighten people out of expressing their opinions or taking part in civic and political affairs.

Beyond that, they poison the atmosphere by giving people the unnerving sensation of being watched and they make those speeches about how there are legal and peaceful methods of social change into laughable exercises in irony.

They destroy public confidence and delude policymakers into thinking we can solve our problems by trapping and incarcerating people who complain about them.

Exposure doesn't lead to curbing these practices. It's been some years now since the world learned that the CIA was playing dirty tricks on people in other countries but that has apparently not shamed the agency out of its ways. The only thing that has happened is that we are now willing to do the same things to our fellow countrymen.

"We don't seem to get much change in attitude or behavior," Mrs. Wille remarks. "My newspaper did a story on police raiding coffeehouses for young people sponsored by the YMCA, and last night there was another raid. I'm doing a series now on how come the housing code enforcement is poor—children dying of lead poisoning, slum fires, those kinds of things. We've been writing and publishing this story for 15 years."

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